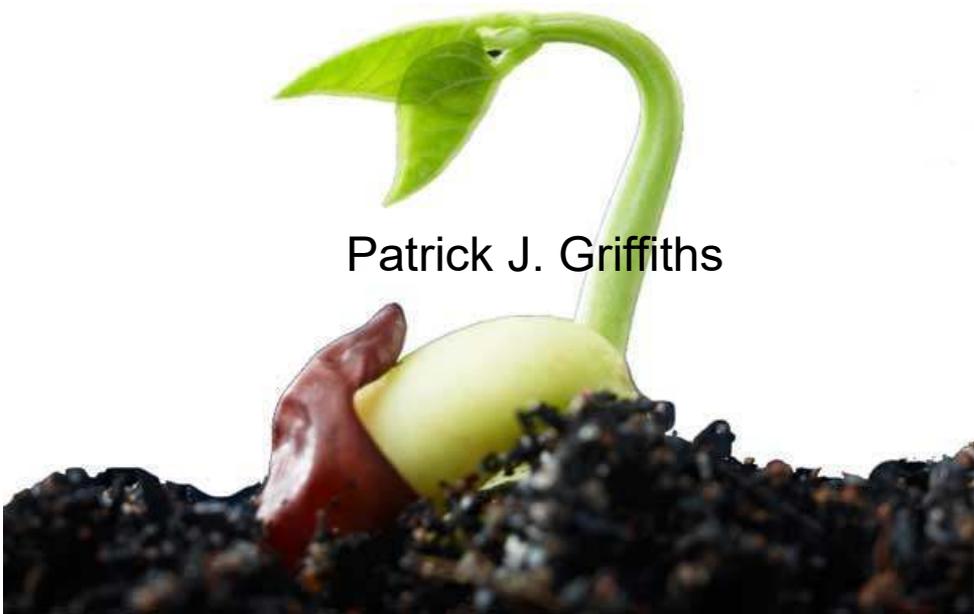


# JESUS WORKS

STUDIES IN TITUS

The **JESUS SEED** always  
produces **GOSPEL FRUIT**

Patrick J. Griffiths





# **JESUS Works!**

A Study in Titus

Patrick J. Griffiths

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# Prologue

One of the prevailing thoughts within Christianity is somehow to have a life marked by obedience. The appeal for obedience comes in many forms such as holiness, works, fruit, or growth. Such appeals leave the believer confused and conflicted. In a desire to live the victorious Christian life, the sincere but uninformed Christian follows the latest emotional stimulant with the hopes that their physical circumstances will change or their emotional darkness will lift.

What cure do we offer the confused and conflicted Christian? JESUS in all of His person and work! Friend, **JESUS works!** The primary premise of this short study seeks to lift from Paul's Letter to Titus its "Melodic Line," the author's main point around which the rest of the letter is structured. We are not fabricating or creating; we are declaring, teaching, and preaching Paul's corrective to the church in Crete. Paul accused the Cretan heretics of professing to know God, but by their very works denying Him (Titus 1:16). Why? Because **JESUS works!** Paul's primary premise carries forward the entire storyline of the Bible: *The JESUS SEED always and inevitably produces GOSPEL FRUIT.* To think otherwise is to be misinformed or uninformed.

But to think such fruit is a joint venture with God is preposterous. Christian obedience is as inseparable from Christ as wet is to water or heat is to fire. You cannot and will not have one without the other. The Christ life **IS** the Christian life. Living the victorious Christian life is not us achieving anything; rather it is us believing His victory over sin and death has been imputed to our account and is the basis for our acceptance before the Father. To think otherwise is foolishness, yet we sit debating obedience! Selling it as if it is marketable. We have made merchandise of living the

Christian life. In the absence of perceived obedience [i.e. holiness], the appeal should not be, “try harder, do better,” but rather believe the gospel.

I do not desire to bring a scathing rebuke to the modern church since the problem is ancient. It is what Paul dealt with and confronted, and its poison has continued to permeate the church. Such theology keeps the church in bondage to works righteousness. Paul offers the cure: **JESUS** <sup>works</sup>.

Let us explain the raised lettering for the word <sup>works</sup>. We believe the JESUS SEED inevitably produces GOSPEL FRUIT, but the SEED is the CAUSE not the CONSEQUENCE. The two are not the same. They are not equals. The fruit cannot be separated from the seed neither does the fruit cause the seed. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, His response reflects this thought: First, love God, and then as a consequence of this, love others. One’s love for God causes one’s love for others. It cannot be separated nor reversed. To keep this order and emphasis in play, we have chosen to capitalize JESUS and superscript <sup>works</sup>. Perhaps you think bigger than this simple visual, but this distinction is necessary because of this prevailing problem within the Christian mindset.

Friends, let us drink deeply from Paul’s Letter to Titus. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to push us past all of our previous theological presuppositions and misinformation. Let us surrender ourselves to the certainty of the Father’s plan, the triumph of His cross, the celebration of His resurrection, and the sure work of the Holy Spirit. Let us hear afresh that **JESUS** <sup>works</sup>. The GOSPEL FRUIT of obedience and Christian holiness is nothing more or less than the product of the JESUS SEED. Moreover, you and I can no more add to such fruit, than we can cause the SEED’S germination. Both works are the work of God.

Therefore, without further ado, I humbly submit the reading of this text for your spiritual enrichment in order that you would grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

# 1

## The Radical Gospel

Read Titus 1:1-4

These opening statements lay bare the division created by the false teachers and their teaching within the church in Crete. It clearly identifies the problem and lays out Paul's solution. What seemed to be so startling in those early years seems to have settled in and made all those present somewhat complacent and actually quite accepting of the error. The error was now dominating as orthodoxy. Paul would have none of this. He vigorously shakes his audience hoping to see them awoken to who God is, what He has done, and who they are in Him.

This paragraph opens for us the Letter to Titus. The apostle Paul had trained Titus as an intern. Titus became for the apostle Paul a trusted co-worker and faithful companion. Titus was of such character and reliability that the apostle left him in the region of Crete in order to realign the local church to the gospel. Such an alignment required the appointing of Elders.

The first paragraph in Titus (1:1-4) strikes several key elements. First, Paul labored under the assumption that his work had redemptive significance. He did it "for the sake of the faith of God's elect" (v. 1). It was to this end he became a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. In order to establish his authority, he postures himself as a servant and an apostle. Why? Because everywhere he went preaching the gospel, there were present those who either opposed him or

taught a different gospel. Knowing why we do what we do sustains God's people as they continue in the gospel. Regardless of whether or not one sees a return on their investment, such activity is "for the sake of the faith of God's elect." Second, his intent was for the elect to understand how a "knowledge of the truth" produced "godliness" (v. 1). As we will see, the church of Crete either divided or reversed this idea. Either they thought there was no connection between the knowledge of the truth and godliness, or they thought godliness led to a deeper knowledge of God. Either way, it was a false error that had far-reaching implications. Third, Paul expands on what is meant by "knowledge of the truth" in verses 2 and 3 by speaking of God's overarching redemptive purpose in the person and work of Jesus. Jesus alone and only is titled, "Savior." Not only are we to **push the gospel outward in evangelism** [for the sake of the elect], but we are equally to **push the gospel inward in edification** [leads to godliness]. It is this holistic approach to the gospel that Paul begins addressing.

Three elements will form for us the foundation on which the Letter is built. First, life [i.e. history] is redemptive. Everything has gospel significance. Second, the JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. The two cannot be separated or reversed. Finally, this gospel will form the Letter's **Melodic Line**, the author's main idea around which all other ideas harmonize.

Paul goes from the rather large thought [i.e. the promise], through the idea of truth producing godliness, and finally leading the reader to its core, eternal life. This life is found only in God's provision. Jesus is eternal life. Jesus is truth leading to godliness. Jesus is the promise. As we work through this Letter, we have reduced this entire idea to **JESUS** <sup>works</sup>. It is our way of encapsulating the much larger idea that the JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT.

Christian obedience is the natural and inevitable consequence of the JESUS SEED. You cannot have one without the other, but the one always produces the other. The order cannot be reversed. No amount of “works righteousness” can do for us what can only be done by the person and work of Jesus.

The thought of Jesus working has two angles that can be illustrated as follows: First, if we were dealing with a household appliance and if asked, “Does it work?” if it does run, we would respond with a “yes, it runs.” Our response is in contrast to, “It is broken and does not work.” Jesus works. He is not broken. A second angle concerning our imaginary appliance is, “Does the appliance do what it is supposed to do such as chop, blend, or crush?” Again, our response would be, “Yes, it does what it is supposed to do.” It actually works. This is the essence of what Paul teaches in the Letter to Titus. This is what forms the melodic line in Titus and will undergird and guide us in our handling of this short, but weighty Letter. **JESUS works**. He is not broken, idle, passive, apathetic, or lethargic. He works! He does exactly what He says He would do. He is active, aggressive, engaged, and energized in causing the fruit produced by His seed. This holistic approach to the gospel drove Paul as a servant and an apostle to preach the Word. This is that Word. Our corruption is so pervasive that WE CAN’T save ourselves, but God is so gracious and powerful that HE CAN save us, and Jesus is so infinite and loving that HE DID. To this message, the apostle was called. This is what God entrusted to him. What God determines, we declare. What He promises, we proclaim. **JESUS works**.

Thus, it is with great anticipation we approach this study knowing what lies before us. May this simple idea saturate our thinking so that our handling of this biblical text will soak our readings and satiate our appetites.

# 2

## Order in the Church

Read Titus 1:5-9

The larger thought within this passage runs from verses 5 through 16, but for the sake of our approach, we will consider this thought in two studies.

Our initial paragraph showed how a “knowledge of the truth” produces “godliness” (v. 1). These two ideas are inseparably linked. “The JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT” will be a reoccurring theme throughout Titus. We have reduced this larger thought to the simple statement, **JESUS works**. As we will see, these two ideas were either separated from each other or reversed from their proper order in the church of Crete. Either way, it was an error with far-reaching implications. Apparently, as the church gathered, key people began teaching this false gospel and as a result whole families were upset (v. 11).

The word “order” in verse 5 is of interest. It is the word *epidiorthoo*. We are a little familiar with the word because of *orthodoxy* [i.e. “right/straight thinking”], our English word *orthotic* [A support, brace, or splint used to support, align, prevent, or correct the function of movable parts of the body], and *orthodontist* [An orthodontist is a type of dentist who specializes in straightening crooked teeth]. This word in our text means, “To straighten further; to set straight thoroughly in addition to; to set in order.”

Things in Crete were moving in the right direction, but needed further straightening. They were slightly off and if not corrected would cause significant shipwreck in the future. “What was left unfinished was the organization of the newly formed churches.”<sup>1</sup>

The following illustration pictures the importance of keeping the order correct: When you have tire work done on your car, you always need to make sure your tires are aligned properly. If they are misaligned, there will be a slight vibration in the steering wheel. Often we simply ignore the problem and allow the tires to wear down to the point of “alignment.” But such an alignment is not correct. In fact, in the absence of a properly aligned car, it can go straight, but it will vibrate you without mercy.

This is equally true concerning the church. We have “the teaching” [JESUS works]. If we do not align our ministries with the teaching, there will be a misalignment that results in a slight vibration in the steering. It might be ignored, but it will lead to bigger problems down the road. And if we do not make the necessary adjustments, we will never be able to really get up to speed and go faster and further.

The Elders of the church are to make sure this alignment happens. The Gospel is our theological DNA and it is the primary function of the Elders to protect that DNA internally and to promote that DNA externally. If the Elders do not pay due diligence to this, the church will vibrate itself to pieces.

Verses 5 tells us Paul’s solution to this problem, “Appoint elders in every town.” It is perhaps a modest response to an appalling threat, but the problem was leadership. If the problem was in wrong leadership, then the solution would be in finding the right leaders. The task was daunting. Think about it. Titus was to find men sufficiently schooled in this

theology so that they could instruct others in sound doctrine and rebuke those who contradicted it (v. 9). This was to be done “in every town.” This text, vv. 5-9, tells Titus what right leaders look like. The first part addresses their character, who they are as individuals. The second part speaks to their task. They are to “give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (v. 9). “They were individuals who held firm to the trustworthy word as taught” (v. 9). Wow, such was the means of guarding the gospel.

This two-fold task contributes to the flow of the Letter. In our next paragraph (vv. 10-16), we read of the Elders rebuking those who contradicted sound doctrine. Then in chapter 2:1-10 we read of their instruction in sound doctrine for the church family.

Our current paragraph (vv. 5-9) shows what GOSPEL FRUIT looks like in those who have the JESUS SEED and occupy the office of Elder. Those appointed as Elders are examples of what “a knowledge of the truth which accords with godliness” (v. 1) looks like in real time. They are living “ordered” lives. This is the appearance of **JESUS** works in the office of Elder. It is only as such individuals occupy the office of Elder that the error permeating the church in Crete would be confronted and corrected. Why? Because “ordered” Elders lead “ordered” churches.

The call is one of aligning with the gospel for the sake of God’s elect (2 Tim. 1:8; Titus 1:1). Not only were they to push the gospel outward in evangelism [i.e. “for the sake of the elect”]. But they were to push the gospel inward in edification [i.e. “leads to godliness”]. May God enable us to keep the main thing the main thing, so that we would appoint Elders in this local church who exhibit such qualities.

# 3

## The Abomination

Read Titus 1:10-16

The larger thought of this passage runs from verses 5 through 16. In our previous study, we saw the two-fold task of Elders (vv. 5-9). They are to “give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (v. 9). The second part of the Elders’ task of instructing in sound doctrine comes out in chapter 2:1-10.

There is an intentional contrast between those appointed as Elders and those who are contradicting the teaching. The character and conduct of the Elders are antithetical to that of the false teachers.

This passage, like many, shows us the function of Elders inside of a local church.

- <sup>28</sup> “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears” (Acts 20:28-31).

Why is this function so important? What is at stake? Often the façade makes one believe everything is okay. But what we do not see is the creeping and pervasive decay of the internal soul rot. Heresy is big business. Gullible Christians allow the

heretic to make merchandise of the people of God. Why is such the case? Why are we so naive? Because we fail to believe Jesus is enough in this life and in the life to come. Why are we so susceptible? Because we do not believe the JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT, and thus we believe we are responsible to create our own happiness and victory. We have come to believe we can “do it alone,” that somehow the believing community is of no consequence in the bigger scheme of God’s redemptive purpose. We have believed the lie that we can have it our way.

The descriptive of the false teacher and teaching is sobering. The outcome is tragic. Paul identifies such individuals as those who are no different from their unsaved peers (v. 12). They are just like the ungodly Cretans (v. 12). In fact, those who have the JESUS SEED always produce GOSPEL FRUIT and those without the Jesus Seed do not (v. 15). The conclusion Paul makes of such people is dreadful: “They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their works.” (v. 16). What have they done? They have done one of two things. Either they have separated the FRUIT from the SEED or they have made the SEED a consequence of the FRUIT.

Paul identifies such people as “detestable, disobedient, and unfit for any good work” (v. 16). “This is the only place where this strong expression is used in the New Testament. It signifies that the life and actions of these men, who professed to be His servants, had made them hateful in the sight of God.”<sup>2</sup> This is an **abomination** of the **JESUS works** principle. How many of these people still occupy the pulpits of many local churches? The number would shock us.

In the language of systematic theology, this theology has separated justification [i.e. the Christ life] from sanctification [i.e. the Christian life]. These people taught that their own righteous works earn their own salvation. They spoke of a

form of Christianity that was without Christ. Jesus was necessary, but not enough. Truly, this is appalling. But more profoundly is the continued impact such thinking has on the current state of Christianity. Many today still separate their justification from their sanctification. They identify their justification as a work of God, but openly teach their sanctification as a work of man. They separate the Christian Life from the Christ Life by seeing their justification as what God has done for them and their sanctification as what they do for God. Paul would find such teaching repugnant. Not only this, but they also confuse the order by believing their justification is based on their work for God, not God's work for them. This too is a theological abomination and a damnable heresy. Such strong language can appear harsh and foreign to the modern ear, but the apostle would have nothing to do with such teaching. Why? Because it struck at the very core of what constitutes the Gospel. Jesus, in His person and work, secured for His people salvation from sin and death. There is nothing for His people to "do" but humbly receive the gift.

May God help us to identify openly this error and then seek to keep the main thing the main thing and not be moved by the theological error of our day. May such teaching withstand the persistent assault of the serpent's seed.

# 4

## Instructing in Sound Doctrine

Read Titus 2:1-10

In our previous studies, we saw the first of two tasks given to the Elders. They are “**to give instruction** in sound doctrine and **to rebuke** those who contradict it” (1:5-16). The second part of the Elders’ task comes out in chapter 2:1-10.

“Paul describes proper Christian living rooted in the gospel, which is in direct contrast to the behavior of the false teachers (1:10-16) but in conformity to what is required of true church leaders (1:5-9). **This is the primary concern of the letter: right doctrine leads to right behavior.** This section is composed of two parallel unites (2:1-15 and 3:1-8) that describe right behavior, root this behavior in the gospel, and close with a charge to Titus to teach these things with authority.”<sup>3</sup>

The descriptive of the false teacher and teaching is sobering. The outcome is tragic. The church is upset (v. 11). The church is being knocked off center. The gospel foundation on which it rests shakes against the assault. There are fissures, spider-like in nature that are almost imperceptible to the naked eye. The initial deviation might be slight and unnoticeable, but the outcome is not. Fortunately, the very gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

Paul calls Titus to “appoint Elders” (v. 5) who can “instruct [the church] in sound doctrine” (v. 9). Here is what that “sound doctrine” sounds like (2:1-10). Paul addresses the various demographics within a local church. His movement

helps us understand his emphasis. I wish to provide the larger outline for this paragraph so that you can see where Paul's emphasis sits.

- I. Healthy Instruction for the Elderly (vv. 2-5)
  - A. <sup>2</sup> **Older men** are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.
  - B. <sup>3</sup> **Older women** likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good,

*Summary Statement (v.5b)*– **So that the word of God may not be reviled.**

- II. Healthy Instruction for the non-Elderly (vv. 6-8)
  - A. <sup>4</sup> and so train **the young women** to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands,
  - B. <sup>6</sup> Likewise urge **the younger men** to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup> and sound speech that cannot be condemned,

*Summary Statement (v.8b)* – **So that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.**

- III. Healthy Instruction for the Workplace [slaves and masters] (vv. 9, 10)

*Summary Statement (v.10b)* – **So that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.**

The reason why Paul speaks directly to the family unit is that the local church is a family of families. What is of profound

interest are the reasons why this instruction is given. Notice the “so that” statements concluding each section (vv. 5, 8, 10). They seem to provide thought division. All three give shades of meaning to the same idea: By your proper conduct, you honor the Word of God. **2:1-10 stands in direct conflict, in opposition to 1:16.**

GOSPEL FRUIT *adorns* JESUS SEED. The word *adorn* is *cosmeo* and means, “To put in proper order.” This goes back to the fundamental idea in Titus. The JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. The collectiveness of that FRUIT is order and self-control.

Fruit *dresses* the gospel. We see the JESUS SEED through GOSPEL FRUIT. Godliness adorns truth. It does not produce the truth. Truth produces godliness, which in turn adorns the truth. Godliness silences the accuser. This is **JESUS works**. To be clear, we are not working from a ledger where we are attempting to balance two opposing elements or a scale seeking to strike a perfect middle. The JESUS SEED causes GOSPEL FRUIT. One can no more stop an apple tree from producing apples, than one might hold back the power of an encroaching tsunami or an advancing avalanche. The JESUS SEED is an immeasurable entity, an undiminished power, and an unapproachable object. Who God is and what He did, does, and will do cannot be measured, minimized, or marginalized by finite man. The JESUS SEED always and inevitably produces GOSPEL FRUIT. This is what that SEED looks like in the church and this is **JESUS works**.

Gospel behavior makes plain the difference between works-based “religion” that focuses on benefits for the practitioner and gospel-based relationship that focuses on honoring the vertical by living in the horizontal.

Each of the three points give instruction to various demographics within the local church. All three, however, collapse on a single idea. Makes sure your life, your behavior, reflects the gospel. The corrective to poor behavior is the gospel, not “try harder to do better.” If you emphasize “good works,” you will eventually lose the gospel. If you emphasize the gospel, you will bear gospel fruit.

What you think **and** what you do matters in the church because it **reflects** God. When you look at your life, do you see and hear the gospel? What is the gospel saying? The gospel says, “I can’t, But God can, and Jesus did.” Does your life and the relationships inside of it adorn the doctrine of God our Savior? Does it say, “Jesus is enough for this life and for the life to come?”

Oh may we come to understand the glory of Jesus in His church -- this is that!

# 5

## The Gospel Tsunami

Read Titus 2:11-15

From the rebuking of unhealthy teaching in 1:10-16 to the instructing of healthy teaching in 2:1-10, Paul reminds the church of its one unalterable foundation, **JESUS works**.

In Paul's Letter to Titus, there is a continued build up. Paul begins in 1:1-4 and opens up with "a knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness" (v. 1). Simply put, **JESUS works**. There is a funneling effect in Titus. He begins in 1:1-4 and continues to build through 2:11-15. The fullest development of this idea culminates in 3:4-8. The idea that **JESUS works** colors the entire Letter. There is no point or paragraph in Titus where this idea is not present. It is as if an infection has gone systemic. However, these three paragraphs (1:1-4, 2:11-15, 3:4-8) cause the reader to pause and refocus on the main point. Our present paragraph is such a pause.

In a penetrating ray piercing the fog of one's understanding, the bright light of clarity begins to dawn. God steps in and sets the record straight. He plants His flag and calls all of His elect to rally around Him. No one and nothing can stop this truth from proclamation. This grace of God is JESUS. This is what Elders are to protect internally and proclaim externally. This is what the church is to keep as the main thing. In JESUS, the Holy Spirit teaches. What is compelling in our text is the energy and power grace brings and the efficacious nature of this grace. Grace, like love, is a verb. Grace acts. Grace does something. Here it says that grace trains or teaches.

This instruction is not impersonal, but relational. It is not impotent, but powerful. It is not stoppable, but surges like the mighty tide of God. It comes in and washes over the elect to cleanse them from every form of ungodliness and worldly passions. It is impossible for the end not to be achieved. The outcome is certain. The Father by sending His Son into the world secured redemption for His people. He gave Himself. *He gave Himself!* The effect is assured. You cannot separate the JESUS SEED from its designed end, GOSPEL FRUIT. You cannot reverse the order. **No work of yours can do for you what can only be done by God.** The Father sent His Son to redeem His people from sin and purified them from every ungodly stain. Oh, let us praise His name!

Yet, the error in Crete is that they professed to know God, but by their very works, they denied Him. Oh, the abomination of such thinking and acting. To hell with such a twisted and gospel diminishing thought. If perhaps the strength of the rebuke is repugnant to our taste, it might be because we fail to understand the depth and glory of the cross.

What is this “godliness?” This godliness is the GOSPEL FRUIT of the JESUS SEED. If you are a Christian, you are godly. What we often do is make godliness something other than what we are. If you are ungodly, you are not saved. If you are saved, you are godly. Our problem has been and continues to be our desire to define or measure this godliness. Paul gives us this descriptive in Titus. A continued problem we have is putting Christianity on a grading system. We categorize people as being saints or godly based on behavior. Rather, if you are a Christian, you are a saint; and if you are a Christian, you are godly. If you are not a Christian, you are not a saint nor are you godly. Being a saint or being godly is not based on your ability, but on your identity. Christ makes you saintly or godly. As a consequence of His work, this is what you look and act like. Why? Because the JESUS SEED

always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. The only way you can become godly is through the gospel. You cannot be godly apart from the gospel and you cannot be godless with the gospel.

This message is what Elders are to protect internally and to proclaim externally (v. 15). This is what the church is to keep as the main thing. This grace of God is JESUS. Oh, may such a truth arrest our thinking so that we choose and feel His power and peace upon us.

At the front end of our text, we read of the appearance of grace (v. 11). At the back end of our text, we read of the appearance of glory (v. 14). Both are consequences of Jesus. At the front end, His people are waiting and looking. At the back end, His people are waiting and looking. One looks for grace and the other for glory. Both are tied directly to Jesus.

When Jesus returns, it will be the appearance of glory. His greatness emanates glory. When you see God, you will see glory. This text answers for us as to why God is great. Why is He so glorious? Why does His appearance bring hope? Why is His appearance blessed? Because *He gave Himself for us*. Stop and let this soak into your brain. Theologically, we call this the **voluntary, substitutionary, and efficacious** death of Christ in behalf of His people.

- **He gave Himself - Voluntary** - He did this of His own “free” will - He could have done otherwise; “Not my will, but your will be done.”
- **For us - Substitutionary** - He did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He did it for us; not for Himself. There was no sin He needed to answer for.
- **To redeem/ to purify - Efficacious** - He accomplished what He set out to do.

This is why God is great. This is why His person and work is glorious. This is why His coming is blessed and hope filled. This coming is not simply something that is future. His coming affects us right now.

- The call to leave ungodliness is built in the gospel. He redeems us *from bad work* [to redeem us *from* all lawlessness]
- The call to live godly is built in the gospel. He purifies us *for good work* [to purify *for* Himself a people for His own possession who are zealous *for* good works.]

They are two sides of one coin. This is why the working of God is unstoppable, inescapable, and unavoidable. This is why the JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT.

# 6

## Amazed by God: The Radical Gospel

Read Titus 3:1-3

Chapter three is a little problematic in that Paul wedges in the middle of it his last stab at hitting the reset button (3:4-8). In light of this, we will consider vv. 1-3, 4-8, and then 9-15 separately.

Verse 1 calls the Elders to “remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities.” The “them” is the church. He was very specific as to the church internally (2:1-10), now he turns his attention to the church and its surrounding community (vv. 1-3). It is interesting to see how often Paul refers to “submission.” Notice 1:6, “insubordinate [i.e. unruly],” 1:10, “insubordinate [same word as in verse 6],” 2:5, “submissive [i.e. obey, the same in 2:9 and 3:1],” 2:9, “submissive,” and now here with 3:1, “submissive.” One of the GOSPEL FRUITS coming from the JESUS SEED is how the Christian responds to others. Christianity is relational. It was never designed for isolation, but community. It is ludicrous to think one can live the Christian life apart from the believing community. Why? Because **JESUS** works.

Paul fully expects Titus, and through his instruction the church, to follow his counsel. Paul wasn't looking for a church vote to affirm his posturing. He fully expected Titus and the church to put off the old and put on the new. Why? Because **JESUS** works!

Notice the parallel structure between chapters 2 and 3. They are both reflecting similar thoughts. Both begin with words to the church as they relate first to one another (2:1-10) and then to the unbelieving community (3:1-3). Both show the basis for the exhortation (2:11-14; 3:4-8). And both conclude with a final word (2:15; 3:9-15).

The intent is to show both the believing community and the unsaved society what the flowering of God's seed looks like. It is like walking in a garden and enjoying the visual display and aromatic fragrance of each flower. However, rebellion, chaos, and decay surround the garden. You and I live in a world gone mad. If you watch the news, our current political scene is insane. The actions of its citizens and the verbiage of the press does not reflect Christian behavior. We live in a world of chaos. God calls us to "cosmos." The contrast is intentional, reflects what began in the Garden of Eden, and will be finally be resolved when Revelation 21 and 22 comes to fruition.

Verse 3 speaks to this conflict. Something happened that changed us from what we were in Adam to what we now are in Christ. This is *the radical gospel*. The reason why we no longer act and speak disparagingly against those in places of authority is because we have been changed by the JESUS SEED. When it comes to politics, many Christians have a tendency to allow their emotions to run ahead of what is true:

1. God has given humanity dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26).
2. There is hierarchy as to function within society (Rom. 13:1). It is shameful the level of disrespect and distrust we have toward those who seek to keep our society in cosmos as opposed to chaos. There are always corrupt individuals who have little concern for the social good, but the structure is to serve the people by promoting order.

3. You have those who govern and you have those who are the governed.
4. Those who govern are bound by God to obey Him (Rom. 13:1).
5. Those who are the governed are bound by God to obey Him by obeying them. There is, however, a descending order of responsibility. God first, then everything else (Acts 5:29).
6. God places those who govern (Dan. 2:21; 4:32). This does not mean they are believers in God's person and program.
7. This world's system is corrupted by the fall and by those who govern. The Bible describes this present age as evil (Gal. 1:4). It has its own prince and it isn't Jesus (Eph. 2:2). The Book of Revelation calls this world's governing system, "Babylon" (Rev. 17).
8. This Babylon does not seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness (1 John 5:19).
9. As redeemed and purified people by the blood of Jesus, we are called to obey those in authority and to submit to their rule (Titus 3:1; Rom. 13:1). No matter what, we are to live gospel rich lives both inside the church and outside the church. We are to "till the soil and fill the earth" by making disciples and planting churches (Matt. 28:18-20).
10. These are the non-negotiables of the biblical *Story*.

Friends, I cannot say this strongly enough. There are two competing forces. They are not equal, but both exist. There is the Seed of the Woman on the one hand and the Seed of the Serpent on the other (see Gen. 3:15). These two forces are in opposition and they will never be reconciled. There will be peace, but it will come at the expense of the Serpent's Seed bowing before the Seed of the Woman.

If you do not see the world in these two polarized and competing categories, you will live a disordered gospel-less life. You will have misplaced loyalties and spend your time,

energy, and resources on “feeding” Babylon. It is unfortunate when we align our theology with politicians. It is good and proper to exercise our freedoms to vote and to stay informed on political issues. However, *no politician will ever solve the world’s problems, just as no politician causes them.* This disorder and chaos is of the devil. There is something greater at work than the fleshly appetites of fallen humanity. Yet, God is still ultimately in control and therefore we can respect authority knowing that the Seed of the Woman triumphs over the Seed of the Serpent. When we “are submissive to rulers and authorities” and “show courtesy toward all people,” *God will amaze the surrounding, watching, and listening world.*

“Around the time of the American Civil War, Abraham Lincoln was asked if God was on his side. His response is a classic: ‘Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God’s side, for God is always right.’ He wrote a ‘Meditation on the Divine Will’ in which he said: ‘In the present civil war, it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party.’”<sup>4</sup>

Let us be assured that God’s agenda and design is radically different from that of the Serpent and his Seed (Rev. 21; 22).

As a Christian, how you speak of the authorities is a reflection of the JESUS SEED. As children of God, we do not respond to and speak of our governing authorities like the children of Babylon. As Christians, “We are looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10). This is our Hope; **He** is our Hope.

If you have put your confidence in the governing powers, let me tell you that God alone is in charge. He alone will end this world’s counterfeit kingdom and thoroughly straighten all that is crooked. It appears overly redundant, but the text

seems to accent this and speak to it repeatedly. The intent is that we get it. What is the point? The point is this: "The JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT."

The gospel radically changes its recipients from the inside out. We are very different from our unbelieving counterparts. We make no arrogant boast as if our own work made us better or more worthy or somehow earned a standing before God. We began with the simple profession that "we can't, but God can," concluding with "and Jesus did."

# 7

## God, the First Philanthropist

Read Titus 3:4-8

As noted throughout this short Letter, **JESUS works**. Paul begins in 1:1-4 by opening with “a knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness” (v. 1). He continues to expand on this idea in 2:11-15. The fullest expansion of this idea culminates in 3:4-8. In one sense, this is our “final” pause in Titus around his melodic line, **JESUS works**. One can no more drive this tune from their heads than one can escape the rampaging of a charging grizzly. The best one might do is “play dead.” The problem in Crete was the thinking that one can outrun a bear sow separated from her cubs. Good luck with that. This song, **JESUS works**, strikes the tune for every paragraph noted in our study.

As we consider this final pause, what more can Paul add to an already full plate?

When we go about describing God, we will often refer to His divine attributes or characteristics. We attempt to reduce God to single qualities such as love or holiness. Yet, God is always more than the sum total of His attributes. We speak of God saving humanity for His glory, which is true. But it wasn't His glory that drove Him to do what He did. His love for those He created drove Him.

If we were to ratchet this entire *Story* back to the beginning, we would read of a God who created this entire world so that He might meet with His people so that they might know and

experience the joy He has within Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This text tells us His love for us drove Him to save us. This love is so powerful as to save us from our past sin in order to produce good works. He moves us from the disobedient to the obedient, from existing as orphans to actual heirs. From those who *deny Him by their works*, to those who *confess Him through their works*.

This is how powerful God's love is. His love secures His end. Neither you nor I can stop the hand of God from acting. Verse 3 shows the innate estate of humanity. Our condition required, yea, demanded intercession apart from which no one would or could be saved. What follows is God's Mission.

God alone moves us from chaos to cosmos, from disorder to order. This is what the Gospel intrinsically does. Neither you nor I can stop this. God takes us from where we are as sinners and through His redemptive activity, turns us into heirs. He is the one who makes all things new. We often ask ourselves as to God's motive. **Why did God do this?** Our text tells us. He loves us.

It is impossible for us to understand fully the depth of God's love. God loves us to the degree that His Son would take on human flesh and become for us what we could never become for ourselves, the sin-bearer. Through the New Testament and in particular this letter, we read of Jesus being the voluntary and vicarious sacrifice for sinners. It is only in Him that the wrath of God against us and the sentence of God could be satisfied.

Friend, I do not know if you have ever experienced buffet eating right when the establishment opens, but it is a sight to behold. It is amazing how much food some individuals can

pile on a single plate, which I find interesting only in so far that you can keep going back for more! Perhaps it is to minimize energy by cutting the number of trips! Paul is doing this. He keeps piling the plate and coming back for more.

This final paragraph pushes us past the point of “filled” to that of “satiation.” It is almost painful, but we are able to push ourselves away from the table and simply enjoy the thought of “no more.” One of the “regrets” of buffet eating is that you do get full! The good news is you can keep going back for more once the appetite returns, and there is always more.

Such is the nature of the gospel. You can keep coming back for more! There is never a time when the table is not set. Sometimes things can look a little messy, but it is always prepared. Why? Because **JESUS** works!

This paragraph describes the grace of God (2:11) as an expression of His “goodness and loving kindness” (3:4). This passage uses the word *philanthropist* to describe God. A *philanthropist* is one who is generous with their resources in enabling others to better their lives and circumstances. As a culture, we note those *philanthropists* with large quantities of resources who dispense excess or lavish financial gifts to various foundations or charities to benefit the less fortunate. Yet, generosity is not based on the size of the gift, but on the heart of the giver. With God, the imagery escalates to unfathomable depths and immeasurable heights. From the excessive riches of His being and resources, He saves His people from sin and death and for joy and glory. Moreover, from this lavish dispensing He causes the recipients to become *philanthropists*. His people become what He is, generous givers.

God loves His people. Oh, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring such Good News. The appropriation of this grace is not based on our work but His (vv. 5, 6). Wow, what clarity. Yet, this appears to be a problem in Crete. Why would anyone think or want to think that it is through their work that God's goodness and loving kindness is appropriated?

With the continued emphasis on "good deeds," Paul's language seeks to center the instruction. The JESUS SEED always produces GOSPEL FRUIT. This FRUIT is produced in you and through you to those around you, but it is not a FRUIT you generate. Its source is not found in you. It is the JESUS SEED that produces GOSPEL FRUIT.

When the JESUS SEED plants within the soil of one's soul, there takes place a washing, a new birth, a renewal. What happens? The JESUS SEED produces GOSPEL FRUIT: "knowledge of the truth, accords with godliness" (1:1). It is this justification that assures one of eternal life (v. 7). It all ties back to 1:1-4. Notice how Paul says it in our text, "those who believe devote themselves to good works" (v. 8). We read this as if we are the one's doing the work, but our text assures us that it is not our work but the work of the Holy Spirit who plants within us the JESUS SEED. Wow, wow, and triple wow. To teach otherwise is to teach a false gospel. Such a gospel is not Good News, but Bad News.

The opposite of this is found in verses 9 and following. The leadership of local churches must seriously take the charge against those who would teach otherwise. The leadership is to assure the teaching of sound doctrine "from the cradle to the grave."

Again, what an incredible Letter. We would do well to reread this short epistle right now.

# 8

## Jesus Works!

Read Titus 3:9-15

This paragraph finds us wrapping up our study of Titus. As we think of these last words to Titus, it is important to put them in relation to 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul writes 1 Timothy and Titus at the same time, whereas 2 Timothy is written about 4-5 years later. Paul knows when writing 2 Timothy that his death is imminent and therefore is less optimistic than when writing 1 Timothy and Titus. Here in Titus, he appears to be making plans. In 2 Timothy, he has finished the race.

In Titus 3:9, Paul continues to attack the teaching that contradicts the gospel. Such teaching is unprofitable and worthless. Yet if it were not attractive and pleasing, it would not be a threat to the church! Such people are to be rebuked, and if unrepentant, removed (vv. 10, 11). Their conduct reflects a non-submissive posturing. Their works deny the gospel. Their conduct does not adorn the gospel. Truly, there is pain in all of this. Those removed were a part of the fellowship, the family, and the teaching. They started well. They professed to know God. They were in leadership. They were instructing the church. Yet, their hearts were turned. They heard the hiss of the serpent, "Yea, hath God said?" They began to bend their ears and slowly, almost imperceptibly, they turned. They failed. They were shipwrecked. Souls were upset. Souls were set adrift. Souls were left unguarded and as a result they were removed from the believing community. What happened? Bluntly put, they no longer believed that **JESUS** works. Does it really matter that

we align with and openly confess Jesus (2 Tim. 1:8)? Does it matter that we follow the pattern of sound words (2 Tim. 1:13, 14)? Does it matter that we continue in the gospel (2 Tim. 3:10) and preach the Word (2 Tim. 4:2)?

We would much rather hear the sound of celebration rather than the blare of battle, yet throughout the Christian life we must live as single-minded soldiers, rule-abiding athletes, hardworking farmers, and careful-cutting surgeons (2 Tim. 2:1-6, 15). As much as we long to set down the sword, such will never be until Jesus returns and thoroughly sets things right. Paul knew this and felt the emotional loneliness that comes from keeping the main thing the main thing.

The Elders of a local church are to protect the gospel internally and proclaim the gospel externally. The church as a whole is to make sure the Elders appointed are determined and driven to keep the main thing the main thing. If left to chance and the sentinels sleep, tragedy will visit the church. If the Elders do not guard the gospel like a single-minded soldier, a rule-abiding athlete, a hardworking farmer, and a careful-cutting surgeon (2 Tim. 2:1-5), then heartbreak awaits the church.

Verse 14 really sits as a potent reminder of the melodic line in this Letter, "Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful." In his final words, Paul reiterates **JESUS works**.

One of the GOSPEL FRUITS of the JESUS SEED is the helping of those with urgent needs. Such assistance is fruitful. It is of interest to see the word unfruitful. The word "fruit" does not occur in Titus and this is the only occurrence of the word "unfruitful" in Titus. Yet, the idea of fruit pervades the entire Letter. Why? Because at the center of the Christian life is Christ! Folks, **JESUS works!**

The gospel of Jesus Christ radically transforms us into something we could never imagine or create. The gospel enables us to extend comfort to others (v. 15). We can pull people in as they are and call them family. It does not require or demand that they be perfect.

This is the good work. This is what we are to do our best at and devote ourselves to. It is all saying the same thing. You and I as a believing community must work hard at pulling people in, treating them as family, and receiving them as they are. Why? Because this is the GOSPEL FRUIT from the JESUS SEED.

As we read and study the Letter to Titus, we should see with an increasing degree of clarity the inseparable connection between the JESUS SEED and its GOSPEL FRUIT. Such fruit cannot be measured nor stopped, but such fruit is inevitable and adorns the gospel. Such fruit sits like ornaments on a Christmas tree. When we begin to see the gospel for what it is, we cannot help approaching life like a small child on Christmas Eve. We go to bed unable to sleep waiting for and longing after the dawning of a new day.

To be sure, life is pain and anyone telling you otherwise is selling something, but is there not a joy that captures our hearts and arrests our attention? Where do we find this joy? What is this joy? It is nowhere and none other than Jesus Himself! Jesus is our joy! It is as we delight in the working of the Holy Spirit in us and through us that we begin to see and feel the only begotten Son of God whom He sent to set things right.

The day is quickly approaching when the Father will once again send His Son into the world to set things right. When Jesus comes, He will thoroughly straighten all that is crooked in this broken and empty world.

Yet, until then we can know and experience the joy for which we were designed when we come to see such joy in the person and work of Jesus. All of creation rushes toward this one incredible and breathtaking moment when we will stand before God and finally see the power of the gospel given to us, worked in and through us, to those around us! Praise His lovely name!

Friends, **JESUS** works!

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *The Reformation Study Bible* on Titus 1:5.

<sup>2</sup> Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers on Titus 1:16.

<sup>3</sup> *The ESV Study Bible* on Titus 2:1-3:8 [emphasis added].

<sup>4</sup> <https://billmuehlenberg.com/2017/03/06/whose-side-god/>









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